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133G Midterm

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4. What is the importance of psychographics such as values, attitudes, and lifestyles in player markets?

Psychographics such as values, attitudes, and lifestyles are important in targeting the marketing and development of games because the characteristics one attributes to one's hypothetical target audience have consequences for the choices that go into a game.

If one assumes that the target player is aggressive and driven by pure competition, the challenges built into the game will favor competition and possibly "zero-sum game" structures, where everything won by one player is necessarily lost by the other. If one assumes that the target player is more interested in cooperation than competition, the game can be designed so that a player benefits more from actions that also help other players than actions that merely hurt other players.

Discuss three games that incorporate a distinct belief system.

I don't know a lot of games well enough to say much about their belief systems, so I went to the one game that my gamer friends always know they can get me to play: You Don't Know Jack. It's a hybrid game that combines trivia and cognitive puzzles with more traditional "computer game" skills like timing and identifying which item to select. While it doesn't advertise itself as promoting particular beliefs (like the games that Novak lumps together in the category "Consciousness & Change," certain attitudes become clear as one plays the game. In fact, I feel more comfortable with the word "attitude" than "belief," because YDNJ is all about "attitude," and seems tailor-made for Generation Xers who approach life with the cynicism of those whose earliest years were accompanied by the background noise of Vietnam and Watergate.

So what does YDKJ (and, by extension, its "model player," to adapt a term from Umberto Eco's literary theory) believe? I've broken the YDKJ credo into four interrelated propositions:

1. Knowledge is good.
2. Irreverence is fun.
3. There's more to life than games.
4. There's more than one way to play the game.

1. **Knowledge is good.** Since so much of the game is dependent on being able to call upon knowledge one has gained outside of the game (or any game, for that matter), there's only so far you can get without actually – Heaven forbid – knowing things. Sometimes it's specific trivia facts, sometimes it's enough to be able to place certain people or inventions into a comparative time frame. One reason I love this game is also why other people love different games: I have a decent shot of winning, but it's not guaranteed.

2. **Irreverence is fun.** The game's "announcer" mocks the subjects of the questions, the players, and himself. The game is even irreverent toward game forms and traditions in general.
3. **There's more to life than games.** This is closely related to the first. Being good at the game requires a great deal of general knowledge in addition to traditional "game" skills. For this reason, it's not always a favorite game of people who are into "pure gaming," or the skills of gaming in their own right.
4. **There's more than one way to play the game.** Knowing facts and solving puzzles isn't the only way to score points. In addition to general knowledge and nimble fingers, excelling the game also calls on one's strategic abilities. For example, once per game you can "screw" another player of your choice, putting them on the spot to correctly answer the current question or suffer a penalty. But if the screwie gets it right (through knowledge or dumb luck), then the screwie assumes the whole penalty. So knowledge about the kind of things your friends do or don't know can be very helpful. Between the different skills required and the way each challenge is set up differently, the game mixes things up enough that it's never obvious who is going to win. This goes hand in hand with being marketed to Generation X, who wants to interact on its own terms.

A first-person shooter game like Doom seems to embody a very different set of beliefs. Aggression is good, subtlety is for the weak, and violence is the answer. I'm oversimplifying the game, and it's ridiculous to think that one can completely characterize someone's personality by the games they choose to play, but I think it's fair to say that the Doom worldview I've sketched in broad strokes appeals to some people more than others, and that while these people are not necessarily aggressive in their daily lives, they also aren't bothered by the idea of aggression and competition.

Thatgamecompany's game *fLOW* seems like almost the polar opposite of a game like Doom. The primary motivation seems aesthetic more than competitive, and one of the player's goal is to "evolve" – a word with connotations that are not applied to a stereotypical FPS gamer, who the highfalutin' might call a "troglodyte." But while the game is more about beauty and exploration than conquering and violence, it's still a bit red in tooth and claw: the main way to progress is to eat other beings, and while the successful player's victims resemble miniscule aquatic creatures rather than warriors or monsters, the fact that you still have to kill as you make your way through a world of increasing beauty seems to speak of a certain sadness behind the joy of game-playing.

If you were to create a game based on your own psychographics, on what features would you focus?

In many ways, I'm not the typical "gamer." I'm not particularly competitive. I'm motivated by the joys of being right and seeing myself as smart more than by achieving arbitrary goals. While some game designers would say that I'm not even close to the target market, others could see me as a market segment that hasn't been properly targeted, so from a game theory standpoint, it might be easier for the right game to dominate the smaller market that I represent rather than fighting to be noticed in a field like the first-person shooter.

Taking myself as the target market for my game, I would include cognitive challenges and general knowledge in addition to traditional “game” skills. I would include humor, because I like laughing and because I see humor as a sort of critical thinking tool that helps one deconstruct familiar situations that people often take for granted. I’m a wise guy who feels like his knowledge is often not appreciated by society, so I want to benefit from what I know. But like my Gen X peers, I’m also barreling straight into the heart of middle age and worried about keeping my cognitive facilities sharp, so I would also want to feel like the game hones my wits as well as proving my knowledge. (The sheer number of TV ads I’ve seen for Lumosity leads me to believe I’m not the only one who thinks there’s money to be made from giving people the sense that they’re keeping their minds sharp.

Like the idealized Gen Xers that Novak talks about, I like to see myself as an individualistic lone world, but I also know that collaboration and cooperation are key – to quote the song “The Future” by Leonard Cohen, “Love’s the only engine of survival.” So I would want to make a game that one could play individually, but which one couldn’t totally excel at without a degree of cooperation.

5. *If you were to create a customized character based on yourself, what would it be like? Describe yourself in terms of a game character. What are your physical and personality characteristics, goals, strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, general mood? Discuss other characters that might also appear in the game. (Note: These characters might not necessarily be helpful but could represent obstacles that prevent you from reaching your goals.)*

My custom character would be clever more than valiant or mighty, and would likely be a good fit for some kind of mystery/detective story in which challenges have to be solved with finesse and thought rather than brute force. The character would have a blend of idealism and selfishness – the character wants to do the “right thing” and is happy to help others, but is not particularly self-satisfying. The real challenge I would like to work into the game is to have situations where actions that might appear to be aimed at helping others or otherwise not be totally self-serving actually *are* optimal decisions to help the player win. This is an oversimplified example, but let’s say the character passes up an easy \$100 reward to get an elderly woman’s cat down from a tree, not knowing that the elderly woman is actually looking for an heir to whom to bequeath her fortune.

Physically, my character would be kind of an everyman, not musclebound or exceptionally talented, but with the skills necessary to get through life.

Reference:

Alessandro Canossa and Anders Drachen, “Play-Personas: Behaviours and Belief systems in User-Centred Game Design.”

http://www.itu.dk/~alec/Canossa_PlayPersona_Interact09.pdf